Discussion: Working Memory and Context Effects

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Working Memory and Survey Response

Example of a less than optimally-designed question

- ◦ "During the past 12 months, about how much did you spend on medical care for yourself? Do NOT include the cost of over-the-counter remedies, the cost of health insurance premiums, or any costs to which you expect to be reimbursed."
- ◦ The several response options of what not to include will tax the working memory resources of respondents

Working memory and response order effects

In both web and telephone, expected pattern of results observed in young respondents

➤ Higher WM

  ➤ Greater endorsements of first options in telephone

  ➤ Greater endorsements of last options in web

➤ For older (over 65) respondents, might WM be so depleted

  ➤ That better WM permits attention to first option that catches the eye

  ➤ That worse WM leads to more random responding

Working memory and question order effects

Contrast effects observed with those with greater WM

➢Consistent with notion that contrast effects require greater cognitive resources in comparison to assimilation effects

➢Restricted to telephone mode

  ➢Both specific-general (happiness) and part-part (labor) impacted

➢Web mode

  ➢Does visual mode assist those with fewer cognitive resources?

Results not consistent with expectations (1)

Overall, predicted results not reliably observed

➢ No overall response order effect

  ➢ Cannot attribute to plausibility in 3-way interaction model of order, mode, and plausibility

    ➢ Lower endorsed options show no clear pattern

➢ Bishop and Smith also found response order effects to be minimized in actual surveys (POQ, 2001)

➢ Field (uncontrolled) vs Lab (controlled) differences

Results not consistent with expectations (2)

Overall, predicted results **with WM** not reliably observed

➢ With part-part questions

➢ Assimilation question-order effects expected to be exacerbated among those with higher WM – NOT OBSERVED

➢ Again, does the field minimize the ability to observe effects

➢ Even if so, effects of WM matter